Book Reviews

A Better Way to Zone: Ten Principles to Create More Livable Cities

Review of Donald L. Elliott

Reviewed by Trey Akers

Elliott's comprehensive account of zoning practice diligently chronicles the evolution of code theory, development and implementation throughout zoning's brief but complex history. Like other authors, Elliot often describes the increasingly complex nature of regulations as the legal detritus from several decades of amendments that have clogged the process. In this way he shows that, more often than not, zoning tends to be evolutionary, not revolutionary (4). To sort through this growing mass of legalese, he provides an in-depth description of every main zoning category—Euclidean, form-based codes, PUD developments, performance codes and hybrid codes—as well as the legal background of each model. In fact, Elliott's legal background enables him to conduct detailed analysis of each zoning method's statutory repute. Equally impressive, he distills the byzantine patchwork of these laws into straightforward, cogent summaries. The interesting and high-quality writing that marks the pages masks what would otherwise be a very dry read.

Though lacking a pre-stated theme or thesis, the book's chapters effectively carry several common ideas through topically-distinct sections. In one regard, this pattern serves the book well—each section explores a topic thoroughly and enables the author to critique from various angles the categories established in the historical overview. Perhaps most often, Elliott stresses the difference in regulations needed for developed versus greenfield areas. His self-acknowledged bias toward mature urban areas (he is in favor of them and has worked extensively in many) leads him to conclude that regulation in mature areas should be treated as a land management issue, not as a land design issue (48). For instance, he points out that the rules of many urban areas prefer a use-based regulatory system whose preference for function inhibits rehabilitation; such prejudices create barriers to much needed reinvestment opportunities (51). Instead, Elliott argues, cities should adopt framework plans that clearly tie detailed policies to a particular place. He cites Denver's "areas of stability" versus "areas of change" and the accompanying agenda for each as lucid symbols concerning the redevelopment potential of each sub-market (56). This argument works well from both regulatory and free-market standpoints, with the government targeting specific areas for growth and allowing market resources to follow this lead by directing private investment into the same areas.

To achieve the aforementioned policies, Elliott proposes a series of responses to the current zoning framework. He lists three general principles for code reform, premised on the notion that zoning should group uses based on each city's priorities (131). According to his principles, municipalities should combine their lists of uses into fewer, broader categories; control the scale of activity for each site/district; and adopt performance-based standards that regulate building operation, not use, by managing the external use impacts of land-use activities (such as limiting business hours in a mixed-use neighborhood) (141). As evidenced by this list, Elliott favors a revamping of zoning within the existing land-based classification system. He maintains that communities should focus on making changes from an established baseline rather than completely redesigning an entire area (164). He also suggests that communities should "lighten up" on nonconformities in older areas, many of which include mixed-use neighborhoods developed prior to Euclidean templates. Elaborating on this point, Elliot writes, "Most investments in mature areas involve piecemeal, not wholesale, redevelopment,

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and regulations need to address the predominance of incremental changes to an established pattern of development" (55). In practice, rules should be flexible where impacts are small—such as a roof renovation on a house adjacent to a warehouse district.

Elliott closes the book with several topical headings under which he proposes specific changes. Under "Negotiated Large Developments," he encourages large, character-defining developments to be negotiated between developers and cities, though he cautions that, in small projects, this approach is a time-consuming waste of staff resources (184). Turning to the need to "Depoliticize Development Decisions," he urges municipalities to break the public perception that it is fair to change the rules at the end of the game if the voices are loud enough (194). Though these disparate suggestions resist a common heading, their concurrent implementation can produce a promising, unified approach to growth management issues.

Summarizing Elliott, the goal of zoning should be to realize a community vision by providing limited discretion and clear criteria (43). Augmented by flexibility, codes should be responsive to changes in the urban fabric. The author gives numerous ways in which municipalities may move to implement these ideas while supplying the appropriate legal grounding for each method. The countless examples drawn from real-world experiences further enrich this text and lend credibility to the suggestions. This thoughtful, progressive work is a worthwhile read for those seeking a more full and realistic understanding of zoning's messy future.

Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change

Reid Ewing, Keith Bartholomew, Steve Winkelman, Jerry Walters and Don Chen

Reviewed by Jeffery Brubaker

The past two decades have seen a fortification of the chain of evidence regarding humankind's influence on climate change. In 1990, when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produced its first assessment report, scientists were unsure whether the 0.3 to 0.6ºC warming observed over the previous 100 years was due to natural variability. A subsequent 1992 report concluded that the "unequivocal detection" of the effect of human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in raising the Earth's thermostat "is not likely for a decade or more."

Fifteen years of additional observations, fine tuning of climate models, and sharpening of scientific understanding led to the bold, central statement of the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report in 2007, which said, "Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic GHG [greenhouse gasses] concentrations" (emphasis in original). The verdict is in: humans are a main cause of climate change and we have to cut emissions globally, substantially, and soon to avoid the worst risks.

As climate scientists fortified their understanding of the human role in global warming, planning researchers were amassing evidence on "the most heavily researched subject in urban planning": the relationship between the built environment and travel behavior. It became increasingly clear that the research vindicated our common sense: compact urban form—when well designed and featuring a mix of uses—tends to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), particularly through shorter trip lengths and viability of alternative travel modes.

Given the urgency of responding to climate change, and the fact that the transportation sector emits 28 percent of total U.S. GHG emissions, the time is ripe for a book like *Growing Cooler*. The big question that Reid Ewing and his co-authors ask is how much can compact urban form reduce transportation-related emissions of the main climate change culprit, carbon dioxide (CO_2)? Their answer is seven to ten percent. If this number seems small, keep in mind that this is only the reduction due to compact urban form alone. Concurrent strategies such as road pricing, pay-as-you-go insurance policies, parking fees, and better vehicle fuel efficiency can effect further reductions. The popular press has lionized increased fuel efficiency as the way to combat climate change, but this strategy cannot do the job on its own—a point the authors make in the first paragraph of the book and expound upon in Chapter Three, "The VMT/CO_2/ Climate Connection."

While Chapter Three connects VMT to climate change, Chapter Four ("The Urban Development/VMT Connection") is a thorough review of the "causal pathway" between urban form and travel behavior, drawing from and updating Ewing and Robert Cervero's 2001 meta-analysis of travel and the built environment. Four types of travel behavior studies, from the household to the regional level of analysis, "provide a consistent picture": compact urban form can reduce VMT by 20 to 40 percent. The picture may be clearest when viewed with a regional lens. There is a strong correlation between metropolitan "sprawl index" and per capita VMT. (The sprawl index, developed for EPA and Smart Growth America, takes into account four factors: density,

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land use mix, presence of employment and/or population centers, and street accessibility. Unfortunately, Raleigh-Durham is pitted against Portland as an example of differing sprawl index vales.) At the neighborhood level, development that reduces VMT is not just dense; it tends to feature diverse uses, pedestrian-friendly design and street connectivity, and access to transit and trip destinations.

The impact of urban form on VMT comprises the central current of *Growing Cooler*, but other impacts are also discussed, such as induced traffic and development, residential energy use, and residential self-selection. For example, it is often overlooked that homes in compact urban areas tend to have lower energy requirements—roughly 1.4 million fewer British thermal units (Btus) per year. And what reductions can be expected if other VMT reduction strategies are added to compact development? Using a structural equation modeling (SEM) method, elasticities generated from historical data show that increasing density, decreasing highway lane miles, nearly doubling transit revenue miles, and increasing fuel prices could lead to a substantial reduction in GHGs in the future, compared to "business as usual."

Like the research presented throughout the book, the policy recommendations at the end are both timely and refreshingly specific. *Growing Cooler* digs deep into a topic that has experienced burgeoning interest but has received mostly cursory research treatment. It certainly leaves a number of questions to be answered. For example, it does not go into detail on the emerging question of climate change adaptation in transportation planning: how will future climate changes compromise transportation infrastructure and restrict travel options?

The book admits that planning alone cannot get us to 80 percent GHG reductions by 2050. But *Growing Cooler* gives planners good reason to believe we can play a major role in lowering climate change risks—if we are not bound by business-as-usual thinking. This book has the mark of a defining publication for the new climate change mitigation era of the planning field.

A Legal Guide to Urban and Sustainable Development for Planners, Developers and Architects

Daniel Slone and Doris Goldstein with W. Andrew Gowder Jr.

Reviewed by Bill Bishop

This newly published book is much more than the title implies. More than a legal text or reference detailing the various requirements, pitfalls and strategies associated with contemporary development patterns, it is a survey of real-world design, development, operating and management experience from a wide range of professional perspectives. As the authors write, "This book is mostly about the practical application of real-world legal solutions to typical problems encountered in building urban and sustainable development."

In his forward to the book, Andrés Duany observes, "There is hardly anything more complicated to create than a real community. The most important qualification of someone involved in the design of community is the ability to be a generalist." The authors have, in fact, crossed the boundaries of their legal disciplines to address many of the related and interrelated issues that arise during the course of community development. They address a broad range of development patterns or philosophies, but these themes occupy space within a consilient spectrum. The themes include neotraditionalism, New Urbanism, traditional neighborhood development (TND), real urbanism, sustainable development, smart growth, place making, urban infill, and greyfield and brownfield development.

The authors integrate a variety of legal concepts and principles into the design philosophies that underpin New Urbanism and related development. There are a number of useful ideas that recur throughout the text; among these are the ideas that "public forums regarding land use decisions rarely present an opportunity for informed discussion or balancing competing social interests," and "if we want to stop the sprawl of humans across all habitats we must build great human habitat that attracts with its quality of life as well as with its efficient sustainable design."

The book is rich with specific design details, illustrations, and references to master planning, site planning, streetscape and civic design, and architecture. Naturally, the authors bring their own various pro-density, urbanism, and stylistic biases, prejudices, and predispositions to the work. Building on experience with infill, greenfield, urban, and sustainable community development projects, including the seminal Seaside project, the authors describe visions, concerns, implications, and reflections on such aspects as scale, streetscape, design, and the centrally important dynamics of human community. Moreover, they describe a synthesized and perhaps hybridized body of law which they refer to as "urbanist law."

Urbanist law, as conceived by the authors, is different than other bodies of law because it synthesizes otherwise isolated, segregated, and perhaps even antagonistic bodies of law. Its advantages are best expressed by observing the

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frustrating results of "design by fire truck." Specifically, roadways built to specifications that can accommodate large firefighting equipment may achieve a lot in terms of public safety when life-threatening emergencies arise, but they do not address other communal needs, like connectivity or pedestrian accessibility. Responding to these deficiencies, urbanist law is inclusive rather than exclusive and seeks to integrate problems and conflicts rather than to isolate them. It embraces a regulatory structure that is more affirmative than negative, and more enabling than prohibitive. It provides for greater emphasis on community rather than private interests, and it exercises and expresses itself in terms that are well-stated and approachable.

The book is written in a similarly approachable, easy–to-digest style. It combines the various perspectives, disciplines, and dispositions of the contributing authors into an elegant work that contributes to substantive understanding of the community design philosophies outlined above. The title of Chapter Five is rather illustrative: "Fiefdoms and Fire Trucks: Overcoming Impediments in the Subdivision, Plat-Review, and Site-Plan Process." Experienced developers will no doubt recognize the pain and frustration associated with the issues outlined in this chapter, and others may find the material useful and eye-opening. The fact that the road through green fields, like the road to hell, is paved with good intentions is surely no excuse for codifying that road for all to travel down—especially if better paths or paving materials can be found.

It may be all but reckless for planners, public officials, serious students or developers undertaking one of the new forms of community development to overlook this book. The authors represent an enormous depth and breadth of experience across a vast and complicated landscape of development-related issues. Where the text itself does not answer specific development-related questions, it certainly guides one in the direction of those answers. Students and novice developers cannot afford to miss the opportunity to share in the authors' collective experience, while experienced developers, planners and architects can broaden their insights and understanding —and avoid significant opportunity costs—by referring to the book and using its authors as resources.

Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age

Timothy Beatley

Reviewed by Dana Archer-Rosenthal

With nearly two decades' experience writing on urban sustainability issues, Timothy Beatley has established himself as a preeminent proponent of local action as the determinant of true sustainability. Keeping with this theme, *Native to Nowhere* transforms eight years of fieldwork—and an enviable travel itinerary—into an exhaustive set of examples showing successful urban sustainability efforts from cities and towns throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

In his ninth book, Beatley approaches the idea of sustainability through the lens of place-making. He begins with an argument that we have created a built environment modeled in the image of the world's largest corporations and sustained by the prevailing ethos of sprawl. This "march of sameness" has made America devoid of real places—"distinctive places worthy of our loyalty and commitment, places where we feel at home, places that inspire and uplift and stimulate us and that provide social and environmental sustenance." Reversing this trend, by creating places that respect and embrace local resources and communities, is a crucial step towards addressing the social, environmental and economic challenges that we face today.

While many authors might have chosen to tackle the subject of sustainable place-making using a structure based on the three E's of sustainable development (environment, economy and equity), Beatley presents ten categories of actions that play a role in transforming—and localizing—the places and ways in which we live, work, and socialize. While some of these categories cover familiar ground for planners—for example, decreased automobile dependence through design, historic preservation, adaptive reuse and local food production—others touch on areas less frequently included in the sustainable planning agenda: multigenerational communities, shared ownership of property and institutions, public art and celebrations, and creating opportunities for education in nontraditional venues.

These departures from the usual urban sustainability literature are what make this book stand out. By presenting such a range of endeavors under the umbrella of sustainability, Beatley accomplishes two important things. First, he gently provokes the reader to think about what the premise and promises of sustainable development really mean. If sustainable development is supposed to have a temporal aspect—respecting the rights of past and future generations—it should follow that making places safe and accessible for a community's youngest and oldest members should be a key issue in place-making. If sustainability is about reducing the footprint of what

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we consume, can a model of development that remains rooted in individual ownership and consumption really be considered sustainable? One example, beautiful for its simplicity, features a lending "library" for tools that operates in Takoma Park, Maryland and saves residents the money and space it takes to buy and store infrequently used items.

Second, with his broad agenda and diverse examples, Beatley begins to answer the question that seems to daunt many students of planning: How? How do we overcome the numerous obstacles that stand in the way of a sustainable world, including but not limited to social isolation, a lack of individual and political will, and a deeply ingrained culture of wasteful consumerism? Beatley himself acknowledges how daunting these obstacles can be. Furthermore, and somewhat paradoxically, his 200 pages of examples of successful initiatives are at times overwhelming for a reader trying to digest, distill and in some way act upon Beatley's message.

Yet he includes the role of education and the importance of building inclusive political coalitions as components of sustainable place-making, providing two potential answers to these hard questions. Examples of initiatives to train real estate agents to market houses in historical neighborhoods or to talk to their clients about the important ecological qualities or historical merits of their new communities were strikingly logical and creative strategies, pointing to the necessity of including an ever-wider spectrum of actors in the local sustainability project.

From Beatley's many examples, the reader realizes that the shift to sustainability is bound to be a process of fits and starts, with success built more from grassroots initiatives than from public policy—and that this incremental approach to change is not bad. America may not, as a society, be ready for a widespread shift from private to shared ownership, but many individuals might be easily convinced to borrow expensive or bulky tools instead of buying them. These small changes foster lasting habits, trends and movements, and a movement built from local efforts, slowly and inclusively, ensures its own continued success and relevance.

Two problems that stood out within the text were poor copy editing, which served to distract a reader from the points being made, and an over-reliance on certain places and examples to the exclusion of the hundreds of others that exist. Indeed, even with all the examples the book provides, any readers who keep their eyes and ears open to their surroundings or to the media could come up with additional examples of the successful place-making techniques that Beatley highlights. Perhaps this is the most encouraging element of the book. Many articles have been written about the success of Paris' bicycle-sharing program, which provides an environmentally-friendly mode of transportation for locals and tourists alike. But undoubtedly more common are the multifaceted initiatives helping to reconnect people to the places where they live and the natural and social networks that surround them—initiatives that have not yet found a publicist like Timothy Beatley.

The Option of Urbanism

Christopher Leinberger

Reviewed by Michael Skena

Christopher Leinberger's *The Option of Urbanism: Investing in a New American Dream* is an eminently readable account of the re-emergence of "walkable urbanism" as an alternative to the dominant "drivable sub-urbanism" of late-20th-century America. Combining pop culture references, urban form history, and recent research, Leinberger entertains as he leads a general audience of readers through the possibilities and difficulties presented by this new version of the American dream. Although architects and historians such as Andrés Duany, Peter Calthorpe, and Kenneth Jackson have covered the subject in popular and broadly read books, Leinberger's background as both a real estate scholar and a developer of mixed-use projects allows him to address this issue from a unique and relevant perspective. Planners, developers, and all those interested in sustainable real estate development will find this book an engaging and valuable addition to their library.

Leinberger portrays the history of development in America as a pendulum, alternately swinging from density and concentration in the central cities to depopulation through dispersion to the suburbs. He cites an exhibit at the 1939 New York World's Fair as a harbinger for the strong postwar swing to drivable sub-urbanism. The Futurama exhibit, sponsored by General Motors, depicted the ideal city of the modernist movement, replete with superhighways, dispersed downtowns, and a house and lawn for every family. Rather than retreading worn conspiracy theories that blame government and industrial collusion for the spread of suburbia, Leinberger instead makes the case that "Americans willingly engaged in it." The aggregate of countless individual decisions found its complement in a government willing to heavily subsidize the Futurama vision, and together they created an unprecedented suburban housing boom and a blithe

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abandonment of traditional walkable urbanism.

Other authors have more thoroughly described the social or physical change brought by this new suburban form of development, but Leinberger earns high marks for his description of the parallel transformation of the real estate industry. He describes an industry finally awakened to the advantages of specialization, economies of scale, and "Wall Street" finance. Leinberger follows the market's evolution from the roaring home building of the 1950s through the savings and loan failures of the 1980s to the rise of real estate investment trusts and commercial mortgage-backed securities of the 1990s. Each innovation further entrenched the machine of the modern real estate development market, enabling it to more efficiently produce the homogeneous, auto-dominated suburban landscape of early 21st century America.

While Leinberger's descriptions of the negative (and positive) consequences of this drivable sub-urbanism are familiar to planners and even to most casual observers of the built environment, his prescription for increasing walkable urbanism stands out from the current planning dogma. Without relying heavily on government programming or doctrinaire normative planning theories, Leinberger argues that if the "playing field" were level and all development options were supported equally, the market would respond with an increased number of dense, mixed-use, and pedestrian-friendly projects. Using demographic trends and data from consumer preference research, he argues that a strong pent-up demand for these types of projects exists across America, and developers free from the shackles of Euclidian zoning and standardized real estate financing are eager to create a supply. He cites studies that show anywhere from 29 to 54 percent of Americans prefer to live in walkable neighborhoods, and he estimates that in some locations, these densely-knit communities have a sale price premium of 40 percent over similar housing in non-walkable neighborhoods.

For an author aiming to reach the general public, Leinberger does an excellent job describing what many planners see as an impossibly difficult and time-consuming problem. His five-step program for "leveling the playing field" is tidy and simple compared with other, ideologically rigid approaches that entail so many regulations they risk alienating potential residents and planners alike. However, Leinberger acknowledges the challenge in implementing his own prescriptions: rarely do instituting overlay zones, ending subsidies for drivable sub-urbanism, and investing in rail transit qualify as quick policy solutions. Yet it is perhaps telling that his prescriptions for leveling the playing field are concise: in his confident brevity, he reveals a strong belief that market forces will supply walkable urbanism as long as the proper infrastructure is in place, projecting a sort of "if you build it, they will come" mentality. While this may strike many observers as naïve or short sighted, the success of walkable urbanism projects in places with proper zoning, access to public transit, and a strong market demand seems to corroborate Leinberger's argument.

The Option of Urbanism succinctly presents relevant research on the rise of walkable urbanism. Unfortunately the book was published in 2008 before the inchoate recession and the collapse of the American financial system, and it is unclear whether these recent events would alter any of Leinberger's prescriptions for increasing choice in the market. However, his own account of the real estate industry's history suggests that this recession will likely produce significant innovations in the products delivered by developers and their funding sources, just as recessions in the past have done. Time will tell if such innovations ease the process for developing walkable communities and bring about this vision of a new American dream.